

OCCUPATIONS

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on the mountain side. Everything but the largest trees 243
would be cut in the cool season of January or February
and left to dry until just before the rains began in May.
Then it would be set on fire. Precautions were taken to
keep the fires from spreading to
the neighbouring dry forest,
but these were often futile
and vast areas were frequently
ablaze for days until the rains
would put out the fires. In this
way large quantities of forest
containing valuable timber
would be sacrificed for a small
quantity of rice. The burning
would leave a deposit of ash
that would act as a fertilizer for
the rice to be planted. It
would also kill the seeds of
weeds and trees and give the
rice a chance to get a start over
the more vigorous growth of
native plants.

On the plains they used
buffaloes and oxen to plough
when the rains had covered the
ground with a few inches of
water. The flowers of the
pyinma tree that comes out
just before the work begins with the coming of the rains
is called *P'Nah Haw* meaning "the buffalo weeps", for
they say that when the buffalo sees this tree in bloom
he weeps because he knows that he must soon begin
ploughing.



Karen girl carrying
bamboo water pots

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DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

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The wet garment is then pounded on a stone or soused up and down in the water a few times, and that is about all the laundering it gets. White jackets are washed out with soap and, in the towns, are given to the Indian washermen ("dhobies") for proper "doing up."

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For protection from the rain the Karen use the wide-spreading fronds of the palm, which are nature's models for the paper umbrellas of the Chinese and Burmese. Workers in the paddy-fields make raincoats out of thatch woven on flexible bark fibre stays, which they tie across their shoulders. Three or four layers of the thatch make a protection that reaches to the knees. For a hat they tie a bit of palm leaf over the head, or wear a round umbrella-shaped hat like those made by the Shan and Burmese out of the sheathes of the cocoanut-palm or of bamboo. While transplanting rice on the plains a rain cover is made of these same sheathes or of tough large leaves covered with a network of thin bamboo splints bound with rattan. These covers are scoop-shaped and hang from the head down the back, causing a company of cultivators, bent over their work while wearing them, to look like long-legged tortoises wading in the mud.

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Every Karen carries a bag ("hteu") slung over his shoulder as a part of his outfit. It is his pocket, in which he carries everything from money to the small game he has shot. The bag is woven in two parts. One, which forms the straps, consists of a strip from four to six inches wide and five or six feet long. Both ends are fringed. The other piece is from six to eight inches wide and from two to three feet in length. Each end of the long piece is folded lengthwise in the middle and sewed together, thus forming the corners of the bag. The short piece is folded crosswise in the middle and sewed to these corners or ends, thus forming the sides of the bag. The hemmed ends of the short piece form the edges of the mouth of the bag. The cloth woven for these bags is usually red with lengthwise stripes of white, yellow, or black. Different tribes have their different patterns and shades of color. The Karen do not ornament their bags so highly as do the Kachin tribes in Upper Burma. Every Karen woman and girl has some sort of a necklace. It may be a few seeds of the Job's Tears strung together, or some glass beads purchased from wandering peddlers, or silver beads made by Burmese silversmiths who visit the Karen villages during the dry season to pick up odd jobs. A common variety of beads is

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342 tains numerous cracks and apertures, and may be easily removed to allow a corpse to be carried out. Similar partitions divide the sleeping apartment from the rest of the family-room. (See p. 65.)

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342 When we come upon such a village, we may find it surrounded by a stockade, as in the case of those in the Tharrawaddy district, where protection is thus obtained from tigers and other animals of the jungle and also from human prowlers. The stockade is made of bamboo poles, re-inforced by four rows of sharp pickets woven in and out of the fence. (See pp. 55, 57.) The gate of the stockade is constructed of large bamboos suspended from a cross-piece, so that they knock against one another when any one enters. Thus, the

[231] approach of a visitor is well announced. Once inside of the enclosure and past the multitude of yelping dogs which the villagers keep, the visitor comes to the ladder by which access is gained to the communal abode. The ladder, like everything else, is made of bamboo and has small loose rungs that can be easily removed. To an American it looks inverted, for it is narrow at the bottom and wide at the top. If the sun is high, heat is reflected from the burning hot bamboos. Mounting to the floor, one steps gingerly along, fearing the round flooring may turn under him. The hollow bamboos resound, as each rubs and creaks against its fellows. The whole population seems to be peering out of their doors or peeping through the cracks. The visitor enters a doorway, without its door. The first thing in the room that strikes his attention is the fireplace ("hpa k' pu"), which is only a little way from the entrance. The intervening space is largely filled with water-joints, rice baskets, and various household utensils. This is called the water-joint place ("hti pu law"). The fireplace consists of four upright bamboos fastened in the floor beams below and reaching to the cross-beams above. On the floor a rough box-like enclosure is built around the bottoms of the poles and filled in with dirt and ashes. Three round stones, or more in case the family has two pots boiling at once, give support to the cooking vessels, while the fire underneath is fed with dry bamboo fuel. About three feet above the ashes there is a shelf made of bamboo splints with their hard surfaces downward to the fire. The soot deposit on the under side of this shelf prevents the flames from doing any damage. Pots, plates, and other utensils find their convenient resting-place upon the shelf. One or two other shelves above this serve as catch-alls for herbs, baskets, tin lamps, unused food, large knives ("dahs"), and almost anything else that finds its way into the house. A hole cut in each

THE KAREN VILLAGE-HOUSE

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of the two front poles of the fireplace a little way above the floor serves as a holder for the bamboo stick kept for stirring the cooking rice or other foods.

A smaller box of ashes in the center of the room supplies a fireplace for the warming of the family when the air is chilly of nights and mornings. It is then comfortable to sit about the fire, as one visits and tells stories.

The Karen have little use for artificial light. They get up with the sun and go to bed with the chickens. Often the flaring light of the bamboo fuel in the fireplace serves for light, while they entertain visitors or do odd bits of belated work. When they need something more than this, they use a cup containing crude earth-oil (petroleum is found in large quantities in Upper Burma) with a wick sticking out, or they make torches from the resinous oil of the "xaw" (*Dipterocarpus*) tree. These enormous trees when

tapped yield a good run of oil. After each run of sap they scorch the hole and get another run. The oil is mixed with bits of dry wood or punk and moulded into sticks about a cubit long and an inch in diameter by putting it into joints of small bamboo. When it has dried, it is wrapped in palm or pineapple leaves and tied up with bark fibre. When needed for use, one end is loosened and applied to the



A TORCH WITH ITS STAND

fireplace for lighting. It is then set on a rough stand fashioned out of wood, on which it rests in an oblique position and in this manner burns to the best advantage. Nowadays little tin lamps made by Burmese tinmiths after the pattern of the old European lamps are in common use. These hold a cotton wick and give a little light and some smoke, as they have no chimneys.

Usually beyond the cooking place a small partition extends out about four feet from the wall, forming a little alcove and hiding from view the family sleeping-room. The latter is a small apartment not more than eight or ten feet each way and is supplied with either a few rush mats, such as the Burmans are in the habit

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FOOD AND ITS PREPARATION

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Inasmuch as rice is the chief article of diet among the Karen, a few words should be said about its preparation. "Paddy," which is the grain before it has been cleaned for cooking, is brought home from the bins in which it has been stored and spread out on mats to dry in the sun. It is then pounded in mortars to rub off the outer husk. A second pounding removes the inner skin covering each grain and polishes the rice pure white. (See p. 68.) As cleaned rice does not keep as well as paddy, the natives pound out only enough to last a week or two. The kernels are washed in a basket with a sieve-like bottom and are then poured into a pot of boiling water. They are allowed to cook vigorously for ten minutes or less, until they swell and become soft enough to crush easily between the thumb and finger. The water is then poured off and the pot set back in the hot ashes to dry out any remaining water. When the rice is served, it remains whole, firm, and slightly hard. Soft boiled rice is most unpalatable to the Karen, who think it not so sustaining as the less cooked cereal. Nowadays the cooking is done in most places in earthen pots, which are bought from Burmese or Shan traders. These pots are of red unglazed clay, cost but a few annas, (one anna is equal to about two cents or an English penny), and last with care for some time.

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Besides the rice used for ordinary meals there are many varieties of glutinous rice that are cooked or steamed on the plains for an early morning meal or for special feasts. The steamers are made like the Burmese pots, but with a number of small holes in the bottom. These are placed over vessels of boiling water, the steam of which rises through the openings and permeates the grain. I have been told that when a rare feast is desired, the rice is steamed over a vessel in which a chicken is boiling, and the rice becomes flavored with the fowl. Steamed glutinous rice is sometimes mixed with sessimum seeds and pounded in a mortar until it becomes a sticky paste. This mixture is called "to me to pi."

It is reported that long ago, before the Karen had as much dealing with the Burmese as they do now, they cooked their rice in joints of bamboo. At any rate, this is their present practice when out in the forest. The hunter or wayfarer in the jungle puts his rice into a large joint of bamboo, which he stands at the edge of a little fire until the contents are sufficiently boiled. The hard silicious sheathing of the bamboo easily withstands the heat of a single cooking. Once used, the joint is thrown away, for there are plenty more to be cut as occasion demands. Sometimes cooked rice

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- 252 for a journey is carried in the same joint in which it was boiled.
● 15 Certain kinds of bamboo, such as the thorny variety "wa hagu,"
262 which grows in low lands, impart a special flavor to the rice that is
cooked in them. Rice deriving its taste from the thorny bamboo is
thought to be one of the most delicious viands that can be obtained
and is called "me tau." When certain kinds of bamboo bear fruit,



POUNING PASTY IN A MORTAR

which is at long intervals, their seeds are often cooked and eaten in place of rice.

The larger vegetables, like pumpkins, yams, etc., are cut up and boiled until soft. Green fruits and shoots are also cooked, although many spicy kinds of shoots and ripe fruits are generally eaten raw.

262 There are intervals when a village community lives only on
252 rice eaten with a little salt, fish-paste gravy, and red peppers. After

FOOD AND ITS PREPARATION

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time as being about a betel-chew which, strictly speaking, would near fifteen or twenty minutes. The women in the hills, instead of chewing the quid, allow it to remain on the tongue and mull it for hours at a time, much to the annoyance of any one trying to follow them in their conversation, which they keep up meantime.

The areca-nut is cut up with a kind of scissors or a sickle. Some use a section of deer's horn about six inches long in breaking

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KAREN TORACOS PIPES AND A PIPES FOR BREAKING BETEL-NUT

Nos. 1 and 2 are sections of bamboo decorated with etched designs; Nos. 3 and 4 have monkey-bone stumps, and No. 5 is a bamboo root decorated with silver head-work.

up these nuts. The horn is perforated by a hole large enough at one end to admit a whole nut, but considerably smaller at the other end. In being driven through this orifice the nut is broken into bits, which issue from the smaller opening. This nut-breaker is not used as much now as formerly. The areca-nuts and other supplies for betel chewing are kept in the ever present betel-box, which in the hills may be nothing more than an end of bamboo or, among those having due regard for the social amenities connected with the practice, is likely to be a round laquer receptacle or, in rare in-

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415 stances, even a brass box. These more pretentious containers are fitted with one or two trays, on which the supplies are conveniently disposed.

The habit of tobacco smoking is almost as prevalent among the Karen as that of betel chewing. It is indulged in by both sexes and all ages. The dried leaf is rolled into a rude cigar and smoked without further preparation. Pipes of various kinds are also used. The Karen analogue of the American corn-cob pipe is the simplest form, consisting of a short section of a small bamboo with a stem of the same inserted in the side. An approach to our brier-root pipe is made of a curved root of bamboo, nicely smoothed off and fitted with a stem of monkey-bone or silver. The bowl of this latter kind of pipe is sometimes supplied with a silver lining and has a silver wire wrapped around it by way of ornamentation. The ordinary straight pipe may be etched with geometric figures in fine lines and with borders of saw-tooth and star designs. Designs incised on bamboo are found throughout the Malay countries, Borneo, and the Philippine Islands.⁵

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OFFERINGS AND TRAPS ON THE EDGE OF A FIELD

The bamboo platform and basket contain the offerings of the "ta maw a hku" ceremony. Two kinds of rat traps are seen at the left. On the right is a "wa khaw" or spear trap, the point of which is under the offerings at the opening there.

⁵ Szent and Bingham, *Pagan Tribes of the Malay Peninsula*, Vol. I, pp. 205, 21; Cole, *WMA Tribes of the Dease District*, 71; Hone and MacDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. I, 123-124.

MAT-MAKING AND BASKETRY

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larger strip, which is nearly two yards long and about forty inches wide, are sewed together, and the skirt is finished. The cloth for a man's garment is cut and sewed in much the same way.

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III. MAT-MAKING AND BASKETRY

The making of mats and baskets is almost wholly confined to men, who prepare the materials out of rattan and bamboo and spend their leisure hours weaving them. Common mats ("kiau"), such as are used as floor coverings in their houses and to sleep on, and the large ones that serve as winnowing and threshing-floors in the hills,² are woven of bamboo strips about half an inch wide in checker-board pattern. The strips do not run parallel with the edges of the mat, but diagonally at an angle of forty-five degrees. The better and stronger mats are made of strips with the silicious outer surface intact, giving them a smooth and glossy appearance. The softer rush mats of Burmese manufacture are often found in Karen houses, but are not made by any of the occupants, except such as have learned the art from their neighbors.

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The people distinguish between several different kinds of baskets, for which they have particular names and special uses. The large baskets ("kü") for carrying paddy and other produce from the fields to their houses are shaped like an elongated egg with a truncated smaller end and are slung on the back with a bark-fiber strap which passes over the forehead and attaches to loops on either side a little above the middle of the basket. When thus carried, the receptacle reaches below the waist and a third of its own length above the shoulders. If the bearer is heavily laden, he or she partly relieves the weight on the strap by hooks of horn or bamboo root, hung from the shoulders and supporting the bottom of the basket. These large receptacles are woven in diagonal pattern with small strands of rattan, those of the upper half being less than a quarter of an inch in width while those of the lower half are a little wider. The bottom of such baskets are square and flat, and its edges are bound with round rattans. From the corners rattan stays are run vertically to the large oval mouth of the basket, which is finished off with a large rattan around the edge. A midrib down each side from top to bottom adds strength and durability.

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Cotton and vegetables are carried in loosely woven and large-meshed baskets, called "seh," meaning rough or flimsy. A man will

² See note, p. 22.

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285 cut a green bamboo, divide it into strips, and weave one of these in
415 a few minutes, and then discard it after he has reached home.

Inasmuch as the people of the Toungoo country have higher hills to climb and longer distances to travel than those dwelling lower down in the Pegu ranges, they carry their produce in smaller baskets than do the latter. These Toungoo baskets have the shape of an inverted pyramid with the apex blunted. Sometimes they are woven of rattan and nicely finished, sometimes loosely made of bamboo splints. In the houses of the Toungoo Hills I have seen enormous spreading baskets for the storage of grain and other things.

The hill people make small, closely woven receptacles for carrying ordinary articles and also for keeping things dry during the rainy season. They render these baskets water-tight by coating them with gum and afterwards with "thitse" (Burmese lacquer). Probably the Karen have copied this type of basket from the Burmese or the Shan, who make extensive use of them. On the plains the small round basket, holding about three pecks, is in constant service. It is Burmese in origin, as is one of its names, "law" (from the Burmese word, "taung"). Its other name is "na."

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A KAREN WOMAN WEAVING UNDER HER HOUSE

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CARRYING WATER IN BAMBOO JOINTS
Paga Hill, Tharawaddy District.

When the village is on the high bank of a creek, it is no easy work to labor up with six or eight of these bamboo full of water. The strings holding the joints are of bark fibre. Both these girls are wearing Burmese jackets under their Karen "hans."

FEASTS TO THE "BGHA"

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the Karen back in the mythological age, and which the latter carelessly burned when he set fire to the brush that he had cut from his field. What offerings more acceptable to the "Bggha" could be made than the creatures that had absorbed the wisdom of the divine book? That the pig is regarded as a vicarious sacrifice is shown by the rite in which the members of the family touch the side of the animal, while the "Lord of the spirits" is asked to protect them from sickness and sorrow. However, the Karen do not charge the pig with a message to the great spirit, as do the Kenyah and Kayan tribes of Borneo;⁴ nor do they put their sins on the pig, as did the ancient Hebrews on the head of the sacrificial bullock or on the scapegoat.⁵ In Toungoo the dog is substituted for the pig in the family rites, the tradition there being that it ate some of the fragments of the book of wisdom. The Rev. E. W. Blythe is authority for the statement that the cat is also offered to the "Bggha" in Toungoo.⁶ The Bwe and Red Karen tribes, among whom the ox, buffalo, and goat are the common domestic animals, use one or another of these creatures, according to the manifestations obtained through divination.⁷ I am told that in Shwegyin there are some localities where the people do not sacrifice animals of any kind, but make offerings of flowers only.

The leaves used in the feasts must be those of the wild plantain ("ya"), which is found everywhere in the jungle throughout Burma; for the tradition is that it was this variety of plantain which "Htaw Meh Pa," the mythical ancestor of the Karen race, cut off in blazing the trail for his people to follow on the way to a more fruitful land.⁸

The miniature house ("hi hpo kkeh") is intended as a resting-place for the "Bggha," when it comes to enjoy the feast provided for it. This tiny structure is set in the inner room where the pig is killed, the sacrificial fireplace built, and the feast held. This fireplace is a sacred family altar apart from the place where the cooking is carried on daily. The inner room affords greater privacy to the family during the feasts. The Pwo Karen have special trays and dishes for their feasts, which are kept sacredly for this purpose.

⁴ Colonel A. R. MacMahon, *The Karens of the Gold Chersonese*, pp. 140, ff. For the story of the Lost Book see p. 323.

⁵ Hose and MacDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. II, pp. 60, ff.

⁶ Leviticus, 16:21-33.

⁷ Rev. E. W. Blythe in *The Rangoon Diocesan Quarterly*, 1917, p. 9.

⁸ E. O'Riley in *Journal, Indian Archipelago*, 1880, p. 16.

⁹ See ante, p. 5.

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FEASTS TO THE "BGHA"

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I remember being asked by a family, who had become Christians and were discarding the old ways, to destroy these utensils for them. They had not yet freed themselves of their fears sufficiently to perform an act that seemed to them like desecration.

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Families who are about to adopt Burmese customs or to accept Christianity, generally dispose of all their pigs and fowls, with the



UTENSILS FOR THE SACRED "BGHA" FEAST OF A PWO KAREN FAMILY, BARSHIN DISTRICT.

exception of two or three of the latter and one of the former. When the time for a feast arrives, they make the usual preparations; but before the pig is killed, one of the elders will put his hand on its side and inform the "Mā xā" that the family are about to make their last offering and beg the demons to dismiss them and allow them to go in peace. This rite is called "Ta aw-k' tew kwi Bgha" literally, "eating to finish the Bgha'." The statement that this is the final offering is repeated in every address to the spirit uttered during the course of the feast. If the parents of the head of the family are living, they construct a little house and put into it offer-